**Academic Achievement Discourse vs. Human Development Discourse**

**Discourse:** From a philosophical or social science perspective, a discourse is considered to be an institutionalized way of thinking, a social boundary defining what can be said about a specific topic…Discourses are seen to affect our views on all things; in other words, it is not possible to escape discourse. For example, two distinctly different discourses can be used about various guerrilla movements describing them as either “freedom fighters” or “terrorists.” In other words, the chosen discourse delivers the vocabulary, expressions and perhaps also the style needed to communicate.

**Academic Achievement Discourse**

Assumptions

1. Academic content and skills are the most important things to be learned.

Academic content predominately includes literature, math and science, while academic skills are those of reading, writing, problem solving and critical thinking.

1. Measurement of achievement occurs through grades and standardized testing.

The most highly valued method of determining whether a student has been successful is quantitative (numbers-oriented) in nature.

1. Academic Achievement Discourse favors an academic curriculum that is rigorous, uniform, and required for all students.

The preference is that all students in a school take the same coursework and engage in that coursework in the same way – through traditional methods such as note taking, raising hands for questions, and reading the same textbooks.

1. Academic Achievement Discourse is primarily future-oriented.

Learning takes place as preparation for the future. Learning is typically not valued because it is worthwhile and satisfying.

1. Academic Achievement Discourse is comparative in nature.

Value is placed on comparing students, schools, school districts, states, or even countries, rather than looking at changes that take place over time within each of these groups.

1. Academic Achievement Discourse bases its claims for validity on scientifically based research.

Teaching strategies and interventions, benchmarks, and assessments are backed up by scientifically based research data – statistical results obtained by qualified researchers that are published in peer-reviewed educational, psychological, and scientific journals.

1. Academic Achievement Discourse generally takes place in a top-down environment in which individuals with greater political power impose programs, procedures, and policy on individuals with less power.

Much of the impetus for Academic Achievement Discourse comes from individuals with political power – the president, governors, legislators, or CEOs of large corporations.

1. The bottom line in Academic Achievement Discourse hinges on grades, test scores, and ultimately, money.

The bottom line (in terms of defining “success”) is based on grades and test scores. In addition, there is the assumption that students who are successful based on these criteria will occupy lucrative positions in the economy and contribute in this way to society as a whole.

**Key Historical Events Contributing to the Development of Academic Achievement Discourse**

1893 – Committee of Ten

Group of powerful men (scholars, educators, politicians) who were convened in an attempt to bring order into an increasingly diverse student population and an increasingly disparate curriculum that had unfolded during the 19th century in America. The key question was to what extent should the curriculum reflect the needs of the college-bound students as opposed to “terminal” students who would not go on to college. The committee ultimately recommended that both groups take an academic curriculum based almost entirely on a college preparatory format.

Early 20th Century – Implementation of Standardized Testing in United States

Established on the belief that quantifiable experiments/exams were preferable to qualitative, clinical or naturalistic observations.

1905 – Development of the First Intelligence Test

1916 – Stanford-BInet Intelligence Test

First intelligence test to use a single intelligence quotient which created the first IQ scores. This test was administered en masse to millions of US military recruits in 1917 to determine which recruits were best suited for various jobs. In 1919 a grant was awarded to develop a national intelligence test for children and within a year 400,00 such tests were available for us in public elementary schools.

1920s-1930s – Development of Comprehensive National Achievement Tests

1923 – Stanford Achievement Test

1932 – Metropolitan Achievement Test

1935 – Iowa Test of Basic Skills

1955 – *Why Johnny Can’t Read*

Critiqued literacy education and compared US school children to European school children. Claimed failure of public schools to educate children was a threat to democracy. Mass media was fairly new (and very popular), and they picked up the story which incited national fears regarding the future of the nation.

1957 – Sputnik

The Soviet Union launched Sputnik I. The inventor of the hydrogen bomb appeared on the cover of *Time* lamenting how far behind US children were in science compared to the Soviet Union.

1958 – National Defense Education Act

Passed in response to Sputnik, this act authorized $887 million over four years for college loans, scholarships, equipment, and research in the areas of math, science, and foreign languages.

1965 – Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Authorized billions of dollars in assistance annually to poor schools, communities, and children. Paved the way for future federal education programs: Head Start, Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), and No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The effect of the ESEA law was to greatly expand the role of the federal government in education and expand the scope of state agencies to administer federal funds.

1969 – National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) first administered

NAEP tested students ages 9, 13, and 17 in reading, math and science.

1970s – Back to Basics Movement

Established to counter the “negative” effects (i.e. failing test scores) of the open education movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. This moved the national education agenda even closer to engagement with high academic skills and higher academic standards.

1981 – National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) established

Established to investigate the quality of education in America’s schools.

1983 – *A Nation at Risk* published

Represented the findings from the NCEE report. Criticized US schools for mediocre performance and recommended establishment of common core curriculum and national academic standards. Credited with first establishing “all children can learn” mentality.

1990s – Enactment into law of many of previous two decades’ recommendations.

1990 – NAEP began state-by-state testing to compare performances of 50 states.

1994 – Goals 2000: Educate America Act & Improving America’s Schools Act

These acts called for the crafting of national standards for academic achievement and performance standards.

2001 – No Child Left Behind Act passed

**Negative Consequences of Academic Discourse**

1. Academic Achievement Discourse results in a neglect of areas of the curriculum that are part of a well-rounded education students need in order to experience success and fulfillment in life.
2. Academic Achievement Discourse results in a neglect of positive instructional interventions that cannot be validated by scientifically based research data.
3. Academic Achievement Discourse encourages teaching to the test.
4. Academic Achievement Discourse encourages student cheating and plagiarism.
5. Academic Achievement Discourse encourages manipulation of test results by teachers and administrators.
6. Academic Achievement Discourse encourages the student use of illegal substances as performance aids.
7. Academic Achievement Discourse transfers control of the curriculum away from educators in the classroom and toward organizations that set the standards and exams.
8. Academic Achievement Discourse produces harmful levels of stress in teachers and students.
9. Academic Achievement Discourse increases the chance that students will be retained from year to year and drop out before graduation.
10. Academic Achievement Discourse fails to take into consideration individual differences in cultural backgrounds, learning styles and rates, and other crucial factors in the lives of real children.
11. Academic Achievement Discourse undercuts the intrinsic value of learning for its own sake.
12. Academic Achievement Discourse results in the institution of developmentally inappropriate practices in the schools.

**Human Development Discourse**

Assumptions

1. Becoming a whole human being is the most important aspect of learning.

Believes that the aim of education is the development (cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual, ethical) of the individual person.

1. Evaluating the growth of a whole human being is a meaningful, ongoing, and qualitative process that itself involves human growth.

Assessment is a part of the learning process. Students are observed performing or otherwise demonstrating learning within a meaningful context. Assessment is more individualized and students learn something about themselves and their learning from the assessment.

1. Human Development Discourse favors a curriculum that is flexible, that is individualized, and that gives students meaningful choices.

Involves creating learning environments where students make meaningful choices about what he/she will learn in the course of his/her school experiences. Not “one-size-fits-all” curriculum.

1. Human Development Discourse is interested in the past, present, and future of every student.

Focuses on individual students’ experiences and developmental progress. Rather than just preparing students for college and lucrative employment, Human Development Discourse seeks to prepare students to have successful relationships with others, serve their communities in meaningful ways, possess emotional maturity, and demonstrate ethical behavior and a passion for learning.

1. Human Development Discourse is ipsative in nature.

Ipsative means “from the self”. The purpose of assessment in Human Development Discourse is to compare a student’s present performance to his/her prior performances for the purpose of assessing growth.

1. Human Development Discourse bases its claims for validity on the richness of human experience.

Places greatest value on qualitative information: what a student does or experiences in a meaningful learning context. Humanism – affirms dignity and worth of all people; emphasis on emotions, imagination, and creative development. Rather than “scientific” validity, validity in Human Development Discourse is rooted in a different intellectual tradition.

1. Human Development Discourse generally takes place as part of a grassroots effort on the part of practitioners (e.g. teachers) inspired by individual creative thinkers in education and psychology.

Values the power of ideas in a “bottom up” rather than “top down” fashion. Involves knowledge sharing in an atmosphere of trust and synergy.

1. The bottom line in Human Development Discourse is happiness.

Ultimate goal of Human Development Discourse is to facilitate the growth of the whole human being, one who despite obstacles and challenges is able to find deep satisfaction in the events of life.

**Key Historical Events Contributing to the Development of Human Development Discourse**

Plato’s *Republic* – Socrates uses questioning/inquiry to help his “students” advance one notch up the hierarchy of Bronze, Silver, and Gold personality types that were regarded by Socrates as generally fixed at birth.

17th Century – Czech educator John Amos Comenius credited with being first thinker to regard education as a developmental process that begins at birth and continues through one’s life.

18th Century – Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau published *Emile*

Emphasized that children are born with the natural inclination to learn and that a proper education should respect the child’s instincts to grow and should shelter the child from social restrictions.

1801 – Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi publishes *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*

Believed children should learn through active engagement. Book was result of Pestalozzi’s experiences using Rousseau’s ideas at a school in Switzerland.

1887 – German educator Fredrich Froebel publishes *The Education of Man*

Created first kindergarten (“children’s garden”) with an emphasis on play, concrete learning materials and “occupations” which included art activities, gardening, and dance. Book described his experiences and beliefs.

1896 – John Dewey and his wife, Alice, founded the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago.

Purpose of the school was to try innovative educational experiences based on the child’s engagement with real-life experiences in the context of a democratic community.

Early 20th Century – Sigmund Freud’s research and theories

Emphasized the importance of early childhood emotional experiences on later life and formulated a stage theory of childhood and adolescent development that brought new dimensions to an understanding of how children and adolescents grow and learn. Led to further studies by Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, and Erik Erikson who created further theories of development.

1907 – Maria Montessori started her first school in Rome

This started the “Montessori Method” which is based on a respect for children’s ability to learn without interference from adults. Has evolved into a holistic approach to education with adults taking a more minor, facilitative role in educating children.

1919 – Rudolf Steiner created a school for the children of the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory.

His holistic system involves the spirit, soul and body, which Steiner believed developed in children in three distinct phases of 7 years each. His method focused first on educating a child’s physical capabilities, then emotional development, and finally intellectual development.

1920’s-1970’s – Jean Piaget studies development extensively & publishes several articles and books.

Piaget was the first to demonstrate that children think in qualitatively different ways than adults. He developed a stage theory to describe how children’s thinking becomes more complex over time. Provided a foundation for future research including Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences.

1960’s – Beginning of modern “brain research” studies at UC Berkeley

Attention given to how understanding brain development in children and adolescents can facilitate developmentally appropriate practices in education.

**Positive Consequences of Human Development Discourse**

1. Human Development Discourse engages students in learning activities and coursework that will better prepare them to function in the real world.
2. Human Development Discourse enables all students to shine in their areas of strength.
3. Human Development Discourse lessens the need to classify students as learning disabled, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, academically underachieving, or with other negative labels.
4. Human Development Discourse enables students to develop competencies and qualities that will ultimately help make the world a better place.
5. Human Development Discourse helps improve many social problems that plague our youth in today’s fragmented culture.
6. Human Development Discourse helps students become more of who they really are.
7. Human Development Discourse gives educators and students more control over their learning environment.
8. Human Development Discourse results in fewer discipline problems at school.
9. Human Development Discourse encourages innovation and diversity in learning programs.
10. Human Development Discourse promotes the establishment of developmentally appropriate practices and discourages the use of developmentally inappropriate practices in schools.

Primary Developmental Needs at the Four Main Levels of Formal Education

*How can we inspire our students to develop into mature adults?*